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THE WAYFARERS

A BOOK OF VERSE BY

JOSEPHINE · PRESTON · PEABODY

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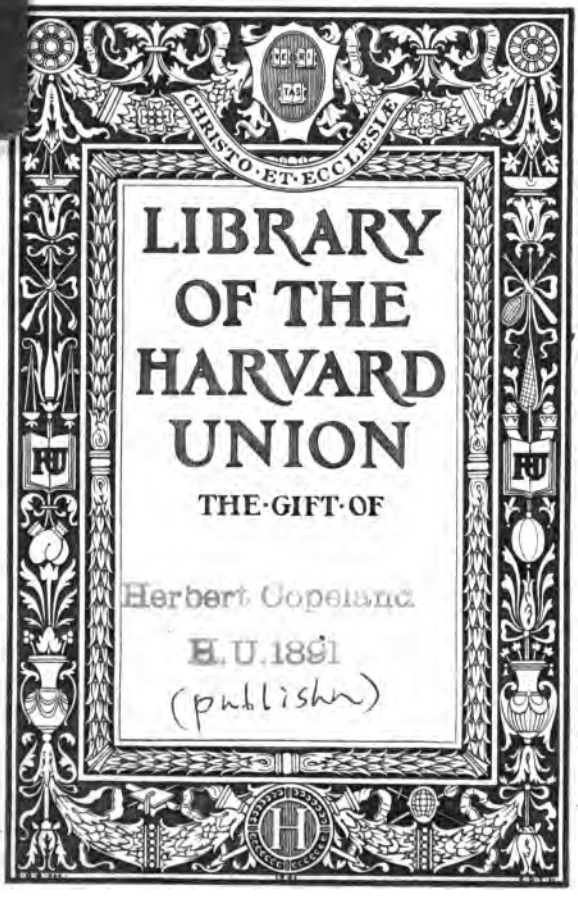

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THE WAYFARERS

Deh peregrini, che pensosi andate
Forse di cosa che non è presente,
Venite voi ai sì lontana gente,
Come alla vista voi ne dimostrate?

La Vita Nuova.

THE WAYFARERS

Josephine Preston Peabody

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TO MY SISTER MARION

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THE WAYFARERS

THE WAYFARERS

I

I HELD my way along the years
With all that errant company.
The eyes of the untroubled spheres
Beheld us, cold with mystery:
We questioned each false guide of day
That lighted us upon the way,
And all our parley sunk like dew into the loud, unanswering sea.

II

But even while we all despaired
In desert places no man knew,
We spake of her to whom we fared,
That she might read our darkness through:
"Life, the Revealer, when we reach
Her mother knees, shall smile to teach
Her soul to us who name her now, as our poor dreams would have us do."

III

There were who journeyed swift at heart
And saw, with eyes unstung of tears,
The coiling sea that lurked apart,
The cold forgetfulness of spheres.
They hoarded not their hearts for gain,
But spent red joy and regal pain:
They wrought, from all their heritage, rich gifts for the unheeding years.

IV

For some had learned the lore of springs
To wake new life within the throng.
With call of pipe and throb of strings,
They pricked the darkness all along.
With viol breath they cooled the sun,
As doves, alighting one by one,
Bring purple solace to the noon, like a dim water and its song.

V

And some were wise, with gracious hands
To shape us fair immortal things.
All the slow craft Time understands
They knew, save how to doom with wings
The creature clay, that answered nought.
Alas, poor gods! For all they wrought
White oracles, yet none gave ear or answer to our questionings.

VI

All these kept songful company,
With brother looks, in diverse tongue;
I wot that manna might not be
A largess sweeter to the throng.
Their speech was such a shadow as
Takes pity on the parching grass.
They would have cheered us, saying, "Life shall tell you that her name is Song."

VII

There were who walked apart from these,
With eyes upon the way beneath ;
They questioned not the wilderness,
Nor gladdened it with eager breath.
The one poor path they bent to see
Crept through the sand-dunes sullenly ;
They girt their hearts up unto pain and said, "Her one true name is Death."

VIII

Some journeyed glad as men that fare
Through dreams ; and of their dream they wove
A loneliness of light to wear
(Like those far-travellers above) :
And bright outlooking, wrapt in this,
They saw no kindred chrysalis
Pent in dull patience, but they sang, "Life knoweth that her name is Love."

IX

But myriads were there more than these,
Like rain, unnumbered and half-heard ;
They murmured at the wilderness —
Poor rain, whose sorrow hath no word ! —
Or plied the lowly tasks they found,
As unseen creatures of the ground, —
The thousand-fold dim voice of noon that is but silence, to the bird.

X

Oh, years alone have songful lips
To tell you how we wandered on,
As far as all the sunken ships
That stirred a ripple, long agone.
And whether I took path away
Or wandered thence for blind dismay,
I know not, but a dusk came down and thrust me onward all alone.

XI

The wistful even, like a moth,
Yearned upward to the only light;
And as a crafty taper doth
The moon did beckon, blithe and white.
The dusk reached blindly as a prayer
Unto the goodly promise there,
And withered: down, with blackened wings, the shadows swarmed into the night.

XII

There was no path to point the way
Where Life abode; no mark was set.
The fields were weary of the day
And seemed to muse and to forget.
The shadows beckoned all in turn,
But when I followed them, to learn,
They shook dull locks, and all the night fell round about me like a net.

XIII

And there the torpid marsh lay prone
  Its dappled length, in mockery ;
And there the sea kept watch alone,
  A live, bright coil that hissed at me.
    Not to the stars I looked for ruth :
    Like vestals high and far, in sooth,
With silver looks of laughter all, they leaned from out the
      dark to see.

XIV

The branches heard their far-off mirth
  And swayed with laughter to and fro :
The servile shadows on the earth
  Made sudden mimicry below.
    The gray winds waited everywhere
    To peer and lurk, and in despair
Go by — go by with aged cries of all the grief the world
      doth know.

XV

And when at last no bitter strait
  Could bring me any wonderment,
They left the thousand ways of hate,
  And all the grievous phantoms went
    As a dark dream of long ago.
    I saw the simple stars burn low,
Like tapers, held of weary folk that slumber when their
      watch is spent.

XVI

A red, red rose, the early sun
  Came up, as glad as any guest;
A white, white rose whose bloom was done,
  The moon did wane unto the west.
    The waking fields breathed warm and stirred
    Small presences of song, half heard;
The wan stars closed against the day like flowers that
    fold them for their rest.

XVII

And suddenly the way was clear
  As any song for them that hark;
And One sat, like the singer, there
  Where every wayfarer must mark.
    A moment all my soul stood dumb;
    And then, because the time was come,
I knew her, by her eyes that held one perfect day,
    from dawn to dark.

XVIII

She sat where all the high-roads meet
  And all the striving ways are one.
The dumb sea crept unto her feet
  With lowered mane, his wrath undone.
    The voice of all the worlds astir
    Sunk to the past at sight of her.
There was naught left but her blind eyes that gazed into
    the climbing sun.

XIX

Surely no least created thing
Was mean, to her, that came her way ;
She turned her from the worshipping
Of prostrate earth, of seas that pray.
She turned her living eyes on me —
Well knew I then she might not see,
And yet their wide-enfolding look was all about me, like the day.

XX

She spake : " I am that One ye sought
Through years that fade, through ways that wind.
I am that One for whom ye wrought
The lovely names ye thought to find :
' Life, the Revealer, when we reach
Her mother knees, shall smile to teach
Her soul to us.' And would I not, if I but knew! But I am blind.

XXI

" Yet by the stranger gifts ye bring,
And by your alien prayers that throng,
I know I am not that ye sing,
The little dream that does me wrong.
Ye pray me that I shew you what
My one name is : I know it not ;
Only I know I am not Death, I am not Love, I am not Song.

XXII

"The nations come to me from far
That love me by a name alone;
And the dream fails them, and they are
Stricken with famine, dream-undone.
Ever my heart cried out to bless,
To shelter all their loneliness;
They dreamed, awakened, went their ways, — oh, years and lonely years agone!

XXIII

"They dream I sit on high, afar,
A light to pierce all mystery;
Untroubled as a fixèd star
That heeds no sorrow of the sea.
Yet stars make patient pilgrimage
Across the dark, from age to age;
And who would know me that I am, must take my hand and go with me."

XXIV

Oh, if I thought to answer nay,
Her dear eyes did not understand;
Wayfarers two, we went our way
From hour to day, across the land!
Her blindness hid the dark from her;
She led me, leal through joy and fear;
From little day to little day she led me child-like, hand in hand.

XXV

And like the sweet of rain, upheld
All tremulous in rose half curled,
The brimming song of things out-welled
Promise of morrows still unfurled.
Ever the wind before us sped
Some mystery, interpreted,
And lifted faces of the hills did beckon us across the world.

XXVI

Oh, step by step, the troubled wood
Spake all its shadow clear to us;
And, hand in hand, the lowlihood
Of wayside weeds grew dear to us.
The shy trees leaned to us, abloom,
A nest called soft from leafy gloom,
And all the hidden heart of things beat sudden, warm, and near to us.

XXVII

And day by day, grown deep apace,
The song welled over to our need,
And all that mystic heart of grace
Enfolded us as kin indeed.
The simple-spoken weeds, that sing
So wisely, taught us everything
Full soft, as aged stars may sing low to the childhood of the weed.

XXVIII

Sometimes there hovers down to her,
Portent of what her name may be,
Like any humming-bird, a blur
Of music and of glamourie —
Awing, away! Sometimes she seems
Houseless, and poor of all but dreams,
Save that her looks are crowned with all the patience of a sovereignty.

XXIX

Sometimes a passing cloud may keep
The secret white and unrevealed;
Sometimes it haunts the wavering sleep
Of a forgetful summer field.
Sometimes the lordly winds are bold
To sing of godhead lost of old:
And I would think her Builder of the world, save that her eyes are sealed.

XXX

I know not if the years be years,
As, great and small, we journey on,
Nor if the service of the spheres
And of the friendly weeds be one. . .
Like singing harvesters, that fare
Weary and glad, we go where'er
She leads the way, with strong, blind eyes, that dare to gaze into the sun.

THEY PASS

THEY PASS

THE SHEPHERD-GIRL

WITHIN the twilight on the hill,
A shepherd-girl I met;
And she was weeping as she went,
Nor may I well forget
The darksome eyes she lifted up,
That bitter tears had wet.

"My sheep are all astray, astray;
And since the sun arose,
I have been searching all the land
Beyond the meadow-close;
And all my sheep are gone from me,
And none are left to lose.

"We wandered, all the summer days,
Where any cowslip led.
The little brook came with us, too,
But now the leaves are dead;
The winds blow chill from yonder hill,
And it is dark," she said.

"Oh, all the summer days I piped
An answer to the lark.
My lambs were growing white as stars,
And fair for all to mark;
And they have left me, one by one,"
She said, "and it is dark."

"Nay, come, thou lonely shepherd-girl,
And find thy sheep with me!
The yellow moon will rise full soon,
And lend her light for thee.
But thou art weary, wandering;
Thine eyes are strange to see."

"Lad, I have called them long and long;
Only an echo hears.
The grass blows gray beneath the wind —
As gray as far-off years;
And even if the moonlight shone
I could not see, for tears."

CARAVANS

WHAT bring ye me, O camels, across the southern desert,
The wan and parching desert, pale beneath the dusk?
Ye great slow-moving ones, faithful as care is faithful,
Uncouth as dreams may be, sluggish as far-off ships, —
What bring ye me, O camels?

"We bring thee gold like sunshine, saving that it warms not;
And rarest purple bring we, as dark as all the garnered
Bloom of many grape-vines; and spices subtly mingled
For a lasting savor: the precious nard and aloes;
The bitter sweet of myrrh, like a sorrow having wings;
Ghostly breath of lilies bruised — how white they were! —
And the captive life of many a far rose-garden.
Jewels bring we hither, surely stars once fallen,

Torn again from darkness : the sunlit frost of topaz,
Moon-fire pent in opals, pearls that even the sea loves.
Webs of marvel bring we, broideries that have drunken
Deep of all life-color from a thousand lives, —
Each the royal cere-cloth of a century.
We come ! What wouldst thou more ? "

All this dust, these ashes, have ye brought so far ?
All these days, these years, have I waited in the sun ?
I would have had the winged Mirage of yonder desert.

ISOLATION

O BROTHER Planets, unto whom I cry,
Know ye, in all the worlds, a gladder thing
Than this glad life of ours, this wandering
Among the eternal winds that wander by ?
Ever to fly, with white star-faces set
Quenchless against the darkness, and the wet
Pinions of all the storms, — on, on alone,
With radiant locks outblown,
And sun-strong eyes to see
Into the sunless maze of all futurity !

Not ours the little measure of the years,
The bitter-sweet of summer that soon wanes,
The briefer benison of springtime rains ;
Nay, but the thirst of all the living spheres,
Full-fed with mighty draughts of dark and light, —
The soul of all the dawns, the love of night,
The strength of deathless winters, and the boon
Of endless summer noon.
Look down, from star to star,
And see the centuries — a flock of birds, afar.

Afar! But we, each one God's sentinel,
Lifting on high the torches that are His,
Look forth to one another o'er the abyss,
And cry, *Eternity, — and all is well!*
So ever journey we, and only know
The way is His, and unto Him we go.
Through all the voiceless desert of the air,
Through all the star-dust there,
Where none has ever gone,
Still singing, seeking still, we wander on and on.

O brother Planets, ye to whom I cry,
Yet hath a strange dream touched me; for a cloud
Flared like a moth, within mine eyes. I bowed
My head, and, looking down through all the sky,
I saw the little Earth, far down below, —
The Earth that all the wandering winds do know.
Like some ground-bird, the small, beloved one
Fluttered about the sun.
Ah, were that little star
Only a signal-light of love for us, afar!

THE WOMAN OF THREE SORROWS

YE would have wondered, had ye felt
Her eyes upon your eyes, the while;
Ye would have wondered, had ye seen
All the wan glory of her smile.

No wonderment was in her eyes,
No bitterness was there, awake,
Only a dark of mystery ;
And thus the Woman spake :

" Yea, it was dark, all dark : no light
Even from sunset ; near or far
Glimmered no dawn, nor was there yet
The distant pity of a star.

" Yea, it was cold : no passing wind
Hurried the chill mist to and fro ;
Blank coldness without sound or stir
Or any whispering snow.

" Yea, it was still : no voice of pain
Did break the stillness without breath,
Dumb as the silence twixt the worlds, —
The great mid-silence we name Death.

" Nay, but what say I ? Now, the lights
As crosses through my tears I see,
Yet know I they are lights no less :
How should ye pity me ?

" My sorrow was the lack of one
My life lacks yet, in whose dear stead
The Heart of all the earth is mine,
And mine, mine too, are all its dead.

" My sorrow was a starving mind
That craved the message of the years :
Now, like a child, I hear, far-off,
The singing of the spheres.

"My sorrow was, I had not one
Of all the world-gifts that may bless:
I go my way, — within my hands,
Only a glorious emptiness."

The Woman held her sorrows up,
High up within God's sight, and said:
"Lo, for Thy gifts, I give Thee thanks!"
And smiled, as smile the dead.

SPINNING IN APRIL

MOON in heaven's garden, among the clouds that wander,
Crescent moon so young to see, above the April ways,
Whiten, bloom not yet, not yet, within the twilight yonder;
All my spinning is not done, for all the loitering days.

Oh, my heart has two wild wings that ever would be flying!
Oh, my heart's a meadow-lark that ever would be free!
Well it is that I must spin until the light be dying;
Well it is the little wheel must turn all day for me!

All the hill-tops beckon, and beyond the western meadows
Something calls me ever, calls me ever, low and clear:
A little tree as young as I, the coming summer shadows, —
The voice of running waters that I ever thirst to hear.

Oftentime the plea of it has set my wings a-beating;
Oftentime it coaxes, as I sit in weary wise,
Till the wild life hastens out to wild things all entreating,
And leaves me at the spinning-wheel, with dark, unseeing eyes.

Sing the while I spin, my wheel, my loyal one, a-hover
Like a circling humming-bird that's loath to leave a rose;
Sing and keep my heart at home, one song, again and over,
Like a summer brook that ever passes, never goes.

Sing, my wheel. To wearied eyes, the flax within my fingers
Is a white and shining cloud, a nest to hold the rain.
Lo! the earth is mine to bless, and not a rain-drop lingers:
Wings for all the hastening shower that greets the world again!

Laugh, my wheel. The rain is past; the rainbow follows after.
All the sparrows flutter down like brown leaves from the year.
Glad with rain, the river hastens on, a-glint with laughter,—
Laughter of running waters that I ever thirst to hear.

Sing and turn again, my wheel; the afterglow is dimmer.
Sing and keep my heart at home. Thy little quiet croon
Is like the soft and far-off voice of twilight fields a-glimmer,
Like musing waters wandering beneath the harvest moon.

Hum, my wheel, like any bee close folded in a flower,
Half a happy captive thing, yet tremulous for flight.
Slow, my wheel, sing low, my wheel, my bee within a bower;
Shadow petals fold thee in; thou shalt not flit to-night.

Ay, for thee, my spinning-wheel! And hast thou wings a-flutter?
Unseen wings that beat to leave the spinning all undone?—
Leave the lowly day for all the songs thou hast to utter,
Born of the dumb heart of things that strive to find the sun?

Slow, and slow, and hush, my wheel; and still thy wingless sorrow.
There may come, as guest to us, some great, benignant Day
To greet us at the spinning here and give us this good-morrow:
"Break, thou little cage of her, and wing the bird away!"

HORIZON

MAKER of songs, what weariness
Upon thy sleepless eyelid weighs?
Maker of songs, what silence lays
Cold hand upon thy lips that bless?
The fallen leaves about thy feet
Are mute beneath the questioning
Of air that finds no song to greet.
Why dost thou listen and not sing?

We cannot see the dreams that rise
  Before those darkened eyes of thine;
We cannot hear the voice that cries
  Unto thy silence, all divine.
There weighs upon our eagerness,
  Our straining eyes that fain would see, —
  Thoughts, wingless, that would follow thee,
Maker of songs, what weariness!

"Face to face with my soul there stands
  A Song — nor may I call her name,
  Nor know from what far place she came;
I may not take her by the hands.
Not wholly wrought, she faces me,
  But like an image incomplete,
And ever smiles, inscrutably,
  A smile whose mystery is sweet.
The slow, wan smile that curves her lips
  Might brood upon the face of one
  Standing forever in the sun,
A watcher of the unseen ships.

"(O lightless eyes whose light I wait,
  Dim smile that tells of listening,
On what far perfect day shall fate
  Breathe through thy soul and bid thee sing?)
I wait the nearing mystery;
  Ye look to me, nor understand.
  For eyes unborn an alien land, —
So Life looks out, to Death, the Sea."

THE FISHERS

YEA, we have toiled all night. All night
We kept the boats, we cast the nets.
Nothing avails: the tides withhold,
The Sea hears not, and God forgets.

Long ere the sunset, we took leave
Of them at home whom want doth keep;
Now bitterness be all their bread
And tears their drink, and death their sleep!

The gaunt moon stayed to look on us
And marvel we abode so still.
Again we cast, again we drew
The nets that nought but hope did fill.

And while the grasp of near Despair
Did threaten nearer with the day,
Leagues out, the bounteous silver-sides
Leaped through the sheltering waves, at play!

So, stricken with the cold that smites
Death to a dying heart at morn,
We waited, thralls to hunger, such
As the strong stars may laugh to scorn.

And while we strove, leagues out, afar,
Returning tides, — with mighty hands
Full of the silver! — passed us by
To cast it upon alien lands.

Against the surge of hope we stood
  And the waves laughed with victory ;
Yet at our heart-strings, with the nets,
  Tugged the false promise of the Sea.

So all the night-time we kept watch ;
  And when the years of night were done,
Aflame with hunger, stared on us
  The fixed red eye of yonder sun.

Thou Wanderer from land to land,
  Say who Thou art to bid us strive
Once more against the eternal Sea
  That loves to take strong men alive.

Lo, we stood fast, and we endure :
  But trust not Thou the Sea we know,
Mighty of bounty and of hate,
  Slayer and friend, with ebb and flow.

Thou hast not measured strength as we
  Sea-faring men that toil. . . And yet —
Once more, once more — at Thy strange word,
  Master, we will let down the net !

CANONIZED

THERE by the wayside, so she ever stood,
  Shadowed and small, unwitting of the sky,
Nought but a little lorn beatitude
  To pray to and pass by.

So young she was, not all the grievous rain
That wept to her had ever taught her tears;
Yet no May morning kindled blue again
Her wide eyes, dulled with years.

So cold she was with vigil — the one care
To be a steadfast saint, she did not know
Vines called to her; her hands held unaware
The mocking gift of snow.

Life was not life to her: she dimly saw
Dim flocks gone by, and herdsmen weary-dull,
And loitering children, to whose brimming awe
She seemed all-beautiful.

Time was not time to her: she heard, content,
The hour, like one more prayer-bead, slipped along
A rosary of vigil never spent,
Matins and even-song.

Was it because she knew not how to stir
An empty hand, and beckon gladness come, —
The wingèd secret spread its wings to her
And took her heart for home?

For close as silence, rounded as a song,
Built sure within the quiet of her breast, —
Shy sanctuary, all the year has clung
A brown deserted nest.

Surely she woke to find the world at spring,
And all her sainthood quickened with the rime;
Surely there came to her on rain-soft wing,
Love, for a summer-time.

Query, and heart-beat, and the eager stress
Of sunward wings made wise her solitude;
Love, and the warm content of littleness
With her maid-motherhood.

Since when she stands as patiently adream
With empty hands outheld, that make no stir, —
All in a long last-year: it well may seem
Time is not time to her.

And yet she knows the plea of vines that call,
The weariness of folk that pass, with eyes
Outlooking on the burden of them all,
Awakened, warm, and wise.

O wind of summer, blow her songs of thine;
O winds of winter, look ye spare alone
One nest, not now too lordly for a shrine,
— Since all the birds are flown.

THE WEAVERS

ALL day I walk among the crowd,
Seeking the Weavers. Well I wot
This noonday, staring blank and hot,
Is not for them; yet in a cloud
Of men I wander — call aloud.
All day I seek, and find them not.

Lo, every night the Weavers come,
And one by one, and silently,
With eyes down-looking timidly,
They steal into the darkening room,
Bent forms and eld against the gloom,
With faces gray as mystery.

Dim faces have the Weavers, — eyes
Of patience that do seem to shun
The waning light, as one by one
They come what way the shadow lies,
Like long imprisoned memories
That dare not look upon the sun.

With flickering smiles of gentleness,
Finger on lip, they come: and soon
Beneath the shuttle's lowly croon
The silence groweth less and less,
As dusk before the loveliness
Of a slow-rising summer moon.

The shuttle hummeth. Hovering
Across the threads, as dark to see
As falling rain at dusk may be,
It poiseth like a wingèd thing
Upon the web ; its murmuring
Is silence wrapt in melody.

The shuttle hummeth. A slant gleam
Of moonlight wavereth along
The faces of the Weaver throng,
Their uncouth shapes : else would ye deem
They were not there, — so doth there seem
Nought save the shuttle's growing song.

Lo, a gray pallor on the loom
Waxeth apace, — a glamourie
Like dawn outlooking, pale to see
Before the sun hath burst to bloom ;
Wan beauty, growing out of gloom,
With promise of fair things to be.

The shuttle singeth. And a mist
Of rainbow hangeth there anon,
Passing away ere it hath shone,
To leave a bloom of amethyst,
Quick fading, too : ye had not wist
Ye saw it clear, ere it was gone.

The shuttle singeth. And fair things
Upon the web do come and go ;
Dim traceries like clouds ablow
Fade into cobweb glimmerings,

A silver, fretted with small wings, —
The while a voice is singing low.

It warmeth into living gold
As cowslips open in the sun ;
It burneth bright, and one by one
Across the sea-rim, ships of old
Pass by, pass by, like stars in fold.
(Who singeth ere the web be done ?)

The ships they sail through moon and star,
Across the shimmering weft of sea.
The iris-winged argosy,
Unharbored of all ports that are,
Sinketh into the sun, afar,
As in the cowslip doth the bee.

The quiet yieldeth up its sweet
To a great laughter ; winds arise ;
Wild birds awaken alien skies,
And in a tremulous outer heat
The pulses of the summer beat
To the deep hum of dragon-flies.

Light cometh yet, and changing hues
Of promise ; and the burning thread,
Like restless opal, fain would wed
The creeping smoke of filmy blues.
One ruddy spark, alight, doth fuse
All color in a dawn of red.

(Who singeth?) Oh, thou rose of flame,
Like a face smiling as to bless,
Out-burning from a shadow tress
Of dark, — a glory without name:
It bloweth swiftly as it came,
Rose of immortal happiness!

"Lo, the Life-glory, it hath come!"
Ah, Soul, who laughed aloud at thee?
Nay, not the Weavers. Mystery!
Was it a shuttle, broken, dumb?
Nought is there, nought in all the room
Save daylight and its vacancy.

Last night the Weavers came and went.
Ay me, so fair a web was wrought,
All wingèd hopes within it caught!
And ere the colors were forespent
The blank day snatched the joy they lent,
Day, staring like a thing distraught.

I seek the Weavers. As I go,
All faces save their own I see,
But not their gentle company, —
Never their smiles that flicker so.
Theirs are the only eyes I know;
All other folk are strange to me.

ONE PASSES IN THE DARK

THE white stars, one by one,
Lean out of their casement high;
And the lily-cup is folded up,
And the moon-clouds wander by.
Come hither, ye little wildwood things,
Unto the call the night-wind sings
Over the brooding sky.
Ours is the noon
Of the fairer moon, —
And a voice in the dark am I.

Morning will come to greet
A little new rose, I wis;
But the loving air that heard it ope
Hath welcomed it with a kiss.
And the clouds with the white up-gathering hands,
Bringing the rain from far-off lands,
They sing as they wander by:
All are awake
For singing's sake; —
A voice in the dark am I.

What shall ye hear by day?
The tread of a thousand feet.
Come but here when the night is near
And listen, and find it sweet.
The voice of the things ye dream are dumb:
The murmur of living, the water's hum,

And the growing of the grass !
Voices of all,
In the night they call :
A voice am I that pass.

The tremor of moths that flit,
The laughter of leaves that blow,
And the hurtling wings of a wind that sings,
And the bending of grass below ;
The little white voice of a flower unborn
That shall not blossom for many a morn ;
Yet it grows all steadfastly ;
Under the night,
It feels the light
Of stars in an unseen sky.

The little hastening hare
Listens, with anxious ear,
To know if the Day be on her way,
Day that must never hear.
Chameleons shy, and the hidden bird,
The silver lizards, all these be heard
In their strange and wilding speech.
If ye but hark,
They sing at dark,
To the night that loves them, each.

Who passes beneath ? Who sings ?
A voice that may live or die.
Let the only thing ye know of me
Be the song that wanders by.

Come hither, ye little living things ;
Sing with me now as each star sings,
Each star in the beckoning sky ;
For the day must come
And we be dumb, —
And a voice in the dark am I.

DREAMS

"THE little Singer sitteth by the gate
Beneath the sun," they said,
"With lightless eyes, as one sits desolate :
And round about her head
The birds all flutter wonderingly and wait,
Wait for their daily bread.

"What dark hath come to shadow with its gray
Her morning sky ? What drouth
Hath seized upon the blossoms in her way ?
Why is her singing mouth
Dumb as the woods are dumb, a winter day, —
The birds flown to the south ?

"God's child the little Singer is ; and why
Sitteth she here alone ? —
The sunshine beating white from yonder sky,
The dawn to noonday grown,
The songless people passing songless by, —
The birds all hither flown ?"

Her weary eyelids fluttered, flower-wise ;
  She raised her listless head
And looked upon them all with darkened eyes
  And slowly spoke, and said,
Clear, through the scattered sweetness of bird-cries,
  " One of my birds is dead."

And there was flitting, all about her face,
  Of restless beating wings ;
And hungry sparrows clamored her for grace
  With mellow questionings.
She spoke again, after a little space,
  And spoke through flutterings.

" One of my birds hath died," she said, " and ye
  Who have not seen my bird,
How should ye know how fleet his wings could be,
  Or what new visions stirred
And wakened at his summer melody, —
  Ye who have never heard ?

" Oh, he had reached the sun in one long flight,
  Had he but lived to fly !
Have I not seen him overtake the night
  In yonder smiling sky ?
Did not my thoughts go with him to the light,
  My wingèd thoughts and I ?

" God's child am I, — and what to me the years ? "
  The little Singer said,
" Safe in my littleness, from any fears,
  Because my steps are led, —
God's child and happy, singing through my tears ;
  But this my bird is dead.

"Cold wings and songless throat; nay then, look ye!"
She said to them, and seemed
To reach soft-hollowed hands, for all to see,
But empty, as they deemed.
And each to each they murmured wonderingly,
"The little Singer dreamed."

"A dream, ye say? But how is it ye tell
A dream from life?" she said.
"Name it a dream, this sorrow that befell,
A dream or life instead;
But once the bird was mine, I know full well:
And now my bird is dead."

She bent her head beneath the noonday glare
In silence, weary-wise.
The birds, like snow-flakes lighting unaware,
Sang clamorous replies;
Among them all, the little Singer there
Sat silent, with closed eyes.

ONE THAT FOLLOWED

I LIFT my heart up in the sun
To show Thee all its song, —
A morning nest of birds for Thee
To whom the birds belong;
I lift it up, I bid it sing
Against the winds that throng.

It needs must be a little gift ;
And yet, since we are free,
Earth-children with the lordly winds
That bear us company,
Right fain we are, with nought but this,
To follow after Thee.

What later offering of myrrh
It may be mine to bring,
I know not yet, I would not know, —
Pain is so gray a thing ;
And sure the dying day may leave
No heart in me to sing !

I know not yet how soon, how long
It may be mine to fight ;
What standard won with blood I may
Lift high before Thy sight ;
I bring Thee but the sunlit sword
I may grasp, blind, to-night.

Knowing Thee Lord of gladnesses
That spring in April wise,
Who lovest all the eager things
In wood and sea and skies,
I shake the tears from off my heart,
And the rain from out mine eyes.

But never be it said of me,
I loitered by the way ; —
Spent all the glad light wandering
As any sea-gull may,
And fled to Thee for shelter, late,
With the disheartened day.

Lord Christ, Lord Love, we bring to Thee
Our joy at earliest,
The joy of the unknowing day
That looks unto the west.
Now who will bear us company
Upon the morning quest?

A WATER-CARRIER

(*He speaks*)

WOULD they bring hither all their thirst to me,
If they but knew, I wonder. . . There the path
Lurks unsuspected, like a trodden thing
Subtle with pain, some lizard, dusty dim,
That creeps a weary way beneath the noon
And turns unto the desert, very sure
That none will follow.
Oh, my wilderness
Without a promise, save for who must find
A sweetness in the sand! Where nothing grows
But light too far to gather, — in the east
One early rose, and in the west one rose;
Dank shadows thick as weeds, and oftentime
Petals of cloud soft shed from fields of heaven.
Stern garden of no promise! Yet I found,
Long since, the hidden spring that none doth know
Save I who hollowed out the eager sand,
Rushing to drink, and ringed the place with stone.

There the cool boon wells up from starless dark,
(Song-sparkle struck like fire from speechless flint !)
Forever answering, with tranquil look,
The tranquil look of skies like summer sea,
Where nothing but a slow bird, half a-dream,
Ripples the silence. There, sole creature joy,
Leaning her dear locks over to look down
Upon the well, — eternal newcomer
Soft-singing to the heart of loneliness, —
The one Palm muses.

(*He sings*)

Yea, I call
Unto you, ye people all,
Unto you, ye passers-by !
Come and try
What sweet things the water saith
Of a pool where wandereth
Star or shadow, drifting by.
Softer than a ringdove's coo
It shall bubble forth for you ;
Brighter than the ringdove's neck,
When he flutters, at the beck
Of the sunshine after rain,
Down unto the pool and dips.
Answer for your thirsty lips,
Sudden wings for pain,
Bounty that is fain to bless,
Shadow for your weariness
That no eve may bring again !
Drink, if ye would know the laughter
Of the brown earth, after
Rain !

I have been heedful of the boon, be sure, —
Walking in fear lest my way-weariness
Should quench the tremulous laughter that I bring;
Guarding it jealously from dust and drought
And covetous thirst of noontide. Yea, sometimes
When the jars weighed like heaven, too great and hot
Resting upon my head, too many stars
To poise so high above a parching world,
I have shut close my heart lest there should steal
Some bitter fragrance from heart's bitterness,
Such as the weeds may loosen at nightfall,
Wearied. . . But still the clay holds fast its sweet,
Like silence; and ye know not, for ye come
And ask the water, and ye drink of it,
And take strange coolness of it, — a glad thing!
Sometimes I think I pour my very joy
Out with the draught, since gladness follows it
As sea-bird after sail; and there is left
The empty heart, like any earthen jar,
It is so heavy. . .

Yea, I call
Unto you, ye people all;
Hearken, hearken, passers-by!
Forth the eager water gushes,
Like a wind among the rushes,
Laughter set at liberty!
Would ye know
Whence it came to glisten so?
Ask of all the stars that glisten,
With the dark at ebb and flow.
Listen, listen:
All the coolness of a dream,

All the mist of things that seem
Only made to smile and go!
Hearken what the water sings,
Mindful of its wanderings
Ere it nested in the jars:
Lilies slow that came to pass,
Warm contentment of the grass
And the memory of stars.
Soothsay of the earth and skies
Treasured so to make you wise:
All the garnered sweet of things,
Wingèd so to give you wings,
Swift from out a caging sorrow
Towards the beckoning to-morrow,
— Wings!

PITY

ALONG the dawn the little star went singing,
Low-poised and clear to see,
Shaking the light, like drops of May-dew, clinging
Her bright locks mistily.
Like any snow-flake faded in the winging,
Her voice fell white to me.

"O winds of Earth, that sorrow as ye fly
And take no rest,
Why go ye ever seeking, with that cry,
Some ruined nest?

"Why weep, my world? Ah, strange and sad thou art,
Thou far-off one,
The saddest wanderer that hath warmed her heart
At yonder sun.

"And I would give thee comfort, if I might,
That know not how;
Haply I see not far, for all the light
About my brow.

"But who shall be thy sister, sorrowing?
Ah me! Not I,
That wander in a bond of joy and sing,
And know not why, —

"Along the dawn, across unfathomed deep,
Unspent, unbowed,
Through shallows of the moonlight, thin as sleep,
Through fields of cloud.

"Poor world, thou aged world, I only know
That I am led
A songful journey: art not thou? Nay, so,
Be comforted."

Along the dawn the little star went; winging
Glad ways across the wild,
Shaking the light that clung to her, enringing, —
An unremembering child.
Wide arms of morning gathered her, still singing:
And the Earth saw, and smiled.

BIRD of yesterday,
Art thou flying south?
Wilt thou leave life's winter
For time's drouth?

Bird of yesterday,
In some eternal spring,
Wilt thou, like a song's ghost,
Stay, — and sing?

IDYLS

IDYLS

THE WATCHING OF PENELOPE

" I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees." (Tennyson's *Ulysses*.)

The Aged Penelope and a Handmaiden.

AH me, day follows day, and Spring returns,
Never to bring my gladness with the leaves.
Can she have lost her youth along with me?
Or are these barren rocks more loath to hail
Her coming than of old? Ah, child, ah, maid! —
I see Spring on thy forehead, and about
The young rose of thy mouth: so there is Spring
Still, sometimes. Lead me forth, Arsinoë.

So hath the Sea smiled on me, vacantly,
For centuries . . . nay, nay, for many days;
The aged speak thus. Yet, thou knowest well,
All thine own life-time I have looked on it,
Counting the years as sails that creep apace,
Always to sink; and the Sea grows not old.
Thy master tarries long away from me.
Yet men are ever so, girl, — stanch in war,
Faithful to chance, forever led away
By some strange thirst of wandering; always fain
To waste their lives in seeking farther things,
Until, the while a shadow beckons them,
The true Life softly slips her fingers out
From their loose clasp, and leaves them to a dream.
It is not so with my Telemachus:
Wise ruler he, even in his father's stead,

Ay, faithful son to me, and kingly man. . .
A man, in sooth! — no more a little lad
To hearken here, with lifted eyes alight,
To stories of his father's deeds in war;
No more a youth. I am grown old indeed,
Old, old; and haply he, thine absent King,
Returning some far day, would know me not, —
So hath long watching changed me, — but would say
To some one of my maidens, thee, perchance,
"What wrinkled shade is this ye wait upon?"
And hear thee say, "The Queen, Penelope."
Yet hath thy master found eternal youth?
So seemed it once, that ever-wondrous day!
Ah, in what guise he came before me first,
Infirm, brow-bent, led by the swineherd here;
A beggar, mark! And I, whose straining eyes
Had watched for twenty years, I knew him not.
Bethink thee, all those mornings, year on year,
How I had watched the cold eyes of the Sea
For any promise, — weaving the day fair
With thread of hope, an endless web to weave
And ravel into shreds again, with tears,
And weave once more. Once more the sun would rise
Bright as a far-off sail, — nay, not so bright,
Until the Sea that hateth all, even me,
Stared mine eyes dim. And so I knew him not.

Bethink thee, maid: a sovereign's right is his,
The man's will ever his, to come and go
And wander whither hope may call afar,
For rumor of great deeds doth follow him
As the foam whitens in his good-ship's wake.

Bethink thee, when thou weavest with the maids,
The man's it is to change the face o' the world;
The woman's part to listen and to wait. .

Who is it stirreth on the hillside there?
(Would he but come again in any wise,
Or King or beggar, I should know him now.)
Were it a stranger, — hasten hither, girl, —
He must have shelter for thy master's sake;
Bid him come hither. No one, sayest thou?
The shadow of a cloud: mine eyes are dim,
But look abroad again, I saw a sail —
A sail far out to sea there: dost not thou?
Nay, strain thine eyes, far out. Yet in good sooth,
I know not whether it be far or near,
I only saw the white in yonder blue.
What sayest thou? A sea-bird, flying low?
A sea-bird. . . But look forth, Arsinoë,
Look forth once more for me: thine eyes are young,
This blue is endless. . .
Dost thou see no sail?

DAPHNE LAUREA

"Arbor eris certe . . . mea."

WAS it not well, Apollo, for revenge
Of thine, my stronghold should imprison me!
Surely thou art content. No dream of thine
For mockery, because I loved thee not,
Could have matched bitterness with this, this spell
That holds me fast, in answer to my prayer.

For had my sire Peneus taken thought,
To put upon me some enchanted shape
Of river-waters, that had been glad life!
I would have fled, for very joy of flight,
Down the cool dusk of Tempé with the days,
Singing and singing to the reeds that sing,
Free as I was of old, and yet more free
From such as thou. . . I would have laughed aloud
With all the laughing leaves — yet loitered not,
Ever apace with time that never stays, —
Forever wingèd with a glad escape!
None should have followed, save the breathless wind,
As some slim hound that follows to the chase.
I would have pricked the darkness like a star,
Holding forth silver hands of welcoming
To the poor sweetness of the meadow weeds;
The river-lilies should have stirred from sleep,
Fain to set sail like little wingèd ships
Against the anchoring root that held them fast.
I would have called unto the untamed things
That love the shadows: "Come, four-footed ones,
Come hither, hither! Drink ye, — be at peace:
Daphne, who hunts you not, would pledge you love
In this cool gift." . . I would have fed the roots
Of growing things, — of wistful trees that lean
Unto the water, even as I, — as I
That am not Daphne, but a thirsty tree.
Ay me, for rain!

When did I think to stand
Blinded with twilight, reaching out vague hands
Through small, thick shadows, — listening with all leaves,

Soft breathing in the sky, in wait for her,
My lady Moon? Hath she forgotten me?
Since nevermore I serve her in the day
At chase, before she leave her pleasuring
To measure us the night. When will she come?
Even at the close of such a fevered day,
But happy then, I lingered through the woods,
Weary with hunting; and I laid me down
Under the shelter of a little tree,
And left it without thanks. I did not know
It was my sister made me welcome there.
Ay me, for rain! . . I had not ever thought
To look so long upon a careless cloud
Grazing on light in pastures of the sky;
I had not thought to tremble, when it came,
For joy of all the bounty of glad rain,
Thrilling my leaves to laughter as the hands
Of a minstrel thrill the harp-strings, that the breath
Of a new life awakes them, and they sing, —
Sing, and give back the joy in rain of song.

Yea, thou art lord of singers, Apollo. Yet
Think not I bend. For Song is lord of thee,
Song, that is thrall not to the deathless gods,
But bloweth ever as the uncagèd wind, —
Strong shaper of the Earth, and measurer
Even of thy strength, Apollo! Yea, I know;
Song, the first-breath, that bloweth through us all,
Encompasseth the universe and thee, —
Even Olympus also. Am not I
A little part of all this life of the Earth?
Have I not heard the dim and secret thing

Our Mother whispers, even in her sleep?
Once I had given no heed: now, being held fast,
With sad roots ever seeking in the dark,
And leaves at parley with the nights and days,
I feel her heart abeat, and, being her own,
I know. Then crown thy lyre, if thou wilt so,
With my unwilling leaves. And let them be
Symbol, to men, of triumph; nay, but hear; —
To thee, memorial that I whisper now:
The eternal thing thou shalt not overtake,
Token of Daphne whom thou couldst not thrall,
And Song that hath the sovereignty, — not thou!

ORPHEUS IN HADES

DOST thou remember how, before he came,
None might have said unto another Shade,
Dost thou remember? Lethe held our hearts
As snowfall covers chill the wearied roots
Of bloom once live, and glad, and full of breath,
When all the Earth is stark and white with dream,
And men say, "It is dead." . .
But when he came
The trance of snow was troubled. Like the Spring,
I felt sweet stir of long-forgotten roots,
Soft wakening in darkness, and afraid.
Ever the air grew warmer, drew a breath
Against the immortal heart-throb of the strings;
Till with some portent like a thunder-burst,
My sleep was rifted. . . There stood I, agaze,
With them that gathered round him where he sang,
Bright as a torch in the bewildered eyes

Of wistful hearers, pressing close, to melt
The lonely peace away. . . I took the heart
Out of my bosom, like a frozen bird,
To cherish it before the living glow:
And it awoke.
And I remembered all.

O FAR–OFF rose of long ago,
An hour of sweet, an hour of red,
To live, to breathe, and then to go
Into the dark ere June was dead!

Why say they: Roses shall return
With every year as years go on.
New spring-time and strange bloom, my rose,
And alien June; but thou art gone.

LYRICS AND SONNETS

WORDS, words,
Ye are like birds.
Would I might fold you,
In my hands hold you
Till ye were warm and your feathers a-flutter;
Till, in your throats,
Tremulous notes
Foretold the songs ye would utter.

Words, words,
Ye are all birds!
Would ye might linger
Here on my finger,
Till I kissed each, and then sent you a-winging
Wild, perfect flight,
Through morn to night,
Singing and singing and singing!

LYRICS AND SONNETS

THE SONG OF A SHEPHERD-BOY AT BETHLEHEM

I

SLEEP, Thou little Child of Mary :
Rest Thee now.
Though these hands be rough from shearing
And the plough,
Yet they shall not ever fail Thee,
When the waiting nations hail Thee,
Bringing palms unto their King.
Now — I sing.

II

Sleep, Thou little Child of Mary,
Hope divine.
If Thou wilt but smile upon me,
I will twine
Blossoms for Thy garlanding.
Thou'rt so little to be King,
God's Desire !
Not a brier
Shall be left to grieve Thy brow ;
Rest Thee now.

III

Sleep, Thou little Child of Mary.
Some fair day
Wilt Thou, as Thou wert a brother,
Come away
Over hills and over hollow ?
All the lambs will up and follow,

Follow but for love of Thee.
Lov'st Thou me ?

IV

Sleep, Thou little Child of Mary ;
Rest Thee now.
I that watch am come from sheep-stead
And from plough.
Thou wilt have disdain of me
When Thou'rt lifted, royally,
Very high for all to see :
Smilest Thou ?

THE VIGIL OF THE SPHINX

A THRONG of stars that keep their watch with me,
A Dawn that flings her roses in mine eyes,
A drifting of the shadeless sand that lies
Along the desert's blank infinity :
From straying winds, the murmur of a Sea,
An oracle, that ceaselessly replies
" Eternity." . . And so the centuries
Come silently and silently go by.
Men came to listen at my lips, of late,
And baffled by the silence, still they pray
The story of a nation and a day
I dreamed of once. And, " O thou Dumb and Great!"
The mendicants within my shadow say,
Nor know I am not dumb : I only wait.

THE SONG-MAKER

"THE starless eyes of sorrow
Why seekest thou, O youth?
Thine eyes speak that men call the truth;
Thy songs bespeak fair morrow!
Thou camest from yon hills serene
Rejoicing; hast thou never seen
The starless eyes of sorrow?"

"Nay, once," he said, "in shadow
A cold wind whispered me,
'The woman Sorrow, — there is she!'
And pointed down the meadow.
But when I crossed the fragrant down,
I saw the maiden Peace, alone,
Her fair face in the shadow.

"The starless eyes of sorrow,
Men say, do never smile:
For me, the earth sings all the while,
The sunlight laughs Good-morrow!
And would that these my melodies
Might bid a single star arise
In starless eyes of sorrow."

SONNET IN A GARDEN

DUMB Mother of all music, let me rest
On thy great heart while summer days pass by;
While all the heat up-quivers, let me lie
Close gathered to the fragrance of thy breast.
Let not the pipe of birds from some high nest
Give voice unto a thought of melody,
Nor dreaming clouds afloat along the sky
Meet any wind of promise from the west.
Save for that grassy breath that never mars
The peace, but seems a musing of thine own,
Keep thy dear silence. So, embraced, alone,
Forgetful of relentless prison-bars,
My soul shall hear all songs, unsung, unknown,
Uprising with the breath of all the stars.

A CHANGELING GRATEFUL

TO M. T. M.

HERE they give me greeting,
House me warm within,
Break their bread and share it
With the heart of kin.

Here the ruddy hearth-light
Singes not a moth,
Gives a summer welcome
As a red rose doth.

I would leave a gift here
If I might: not I! —
Like a homeless laughter,
Vagrant wind gone by.

But while I am a glow-worm
I will shine and stay:
When I am a shadow . . .
I will creep away.

AFTER MUSIC

I SAW not they were strange, the ways I roam,
Until the music called, and called me thence,
And tears stirred in my heart as tears may come
To lonely children straying far from home,
Who know not how they wandered so, nor whence.

If I might follow far and far away
Unto the country where these songs abide,
I think my soul would wake and find it day,
Would tell me who I am, and why I stray, —
Would tell me who I was before I died.

THREE SONGS

I

AH, but when June's gone,
Rose, where wilt thou be?
Not beneath the snowflakes
And a leafless tree!
"Where no wild wind bloweth,
Where it never snoweth,
In a warmer shelter than the South:

Seek me,
Find me
Upon a maiden's mouth ! "

Ah, but when youth's gone,
Rose, and wilt thou bide ?
Never canst thou blossom
In such wintertide.
" Where no winter cometh,
Where all summer bloometh ;
Where the sunlight never may depart ;
Seek me,
Find me
In her belovèd heart ! "

II

My Lady bent her lucent eyes on me
As friend-like greeting,
And smote into my life, unwittingly,
At our first meeting,
With their most deadly sweetness ;
Ay, 'tis so !
Thus hath she slain me with her fair completeness,
Nor doth she know.

My Lady gave her snow-soft hand to me,
And in her fingers
She took my very life, full sovranly.
Now my ghost lingers
Here prisoned, all unwilling,
Ay, 'tis so,
Till she shall grant it leave to quit its dwelling ;
Nor doth she know.

My Lady spake sweet welcome unto me;
And with the greeting
The world slipt into silence suddenly,
At our first meeting.
Now, unto mine ears,
— Be it so —
Nought but her voice breaks silence, all the years:
Nor doth she know.

III

Shall I upbraid or praise her for
The graces she doth shed,
Who cannot help her dearness more
Than any rose its red?

Her beauty blesses from afar
Whether she will or no;
The constant shining of a star
In any pool below.

Whether her eyes remember me
And she be far or near,
She lives, — and cannot choose but be
My Dear!

NEW BLOOM

I HEARD the lilies growing in the night
When none did hark;
I knew they made a glimmer, dimly white
In the cool dreaming dark.
Nothing the garden knew, —
So soft they grew, —
Until they stood new-risen in the light,
For all to mark.

I heard the dreams still-growing in the night;
Nor was there one
That I saw clear or, seeing, named aright;
But when the night was done,
The fragrances to be
Awakened me:
I saw their faces leaning glad and white
Towards thee, their sun.

SUNSET

THERE in the west a dying rose
Burns out its life; and the petals, red,
Fallen apart
From the golden heart,
Fade into ashes around it — dead.

One rose less in my garden grows;
Lo, the unresting Wind, that blows
Round the whole earth from sea to sea,
Gathers the one rose more from me.
Keep it, Eternity.

INLAND

THE ships they pass and sink, and pass,
Like dreams upon the edge of sleep.
The thought of them is mine to keep
As a dim pool may bosom deep
The whiteness of a star that was.

The ships they sail into the skies
Across a bright eternity.
And here, — as at a bird set free,
The caged birds, — far out to sea
The windows stare with haggard eyes.

DRYADS

HUSH, they were here. I caught the gleam
Of white arms interlacing,
Like tangled lilies, tracing
A garland on a careless stream;
And through the swaying tendrils there
Came startled air,
Stirred to a dance, the wood with joyance gracing.

The young birds ceased the day-long lilt
To watch them so enringing,
Like snow-flakes all a-winging.
The eager, bending branches spilt
A sunlight on their locks, leaf-wound.
And was the sound
I heard, a breath of laughter or of singing?

Sure they were here: for see the grass
  Athrill where they danced thither.
  But whither fled they, — whither?
Who wist this thing should come to pass?
  A step, — a sudden fluttering,
  As birds take wing, —
Then but the fragrance of wild grapes blown hither!

WOOD-SONG

LOVE must be a fearsome thing
That can bind a maid
Glad of life as leaves in spring,
  Swift and unafraid.

I could find a heart to sing
    Death and darkness, praise or blame;
    But before that name,
    Heedfully, oh, heedfully
      Do I lock my breast;
    I am silent as a tree,
      Guardful of the nest.

Ah, my passing Woodlander,
  Heard you any note?
Would you find a leaf astir
  From a wilding throat?

Surely, all the paths defer
Unto such a gentle quest.
Would you take the nest?
Follow where the sun-motes are!
Truly 'tis a sorrow
I must bid you fare so far;
Speed you, and good-morrow!

SUMMER SILENCE

FOR E. L.

SURELY, sometimes, afield through summer air
She must have wandered, till she seemed to be
Compassed with silence, saying dreamfully
Unto her heart: All dumb, — no sound is there.
Lo, then, the voice, soft-creeping from its lair
Of stillness — sudden tide of melody —
Horizon to horizon, murmurous sea
Of creature-song that held her unaware!
There's not a fallow silence in the Earth,
Nor yet in Love; although no living lips
Have set the tremulous wings of air astir;
Could she but hear, and know this wordless dearth
A little seeming, faded to eclipse
By the enfolding heart that sings to her.

HAPPINESS

IT was before the sunset that I turned
From where the late day burned,
And climbed the wide brown pasture-lands that run
Along the hillside ; there the warm weeds purr
For comfort of the sun.
Some secret in their look
Led me until, struck through with love and awe,
I saw
My Brook. . .
Glad hastener !
Though the high-tide of clover was astir,
And blue-eyed flowers leaned across the grass
To see it pass,
And the long-tangled tresses
Of water-cresses
Were misted with thin crystal understream, —
For more content
To small suspected presences, agleam
And then away ! — yet ever diligent,
Untamed, soft-fluttering,
The little creature went on rapturous wing,
Loyal and changeful, feathered, yet at rest,
On its own quest,
Subtle as light and simple as a nest.
It mused among the shaggy weeds and bubbled
In broken paths, untroubled ;
With such a tongue to comfort and beseech,
It won the stones to speech.
Long time I listened, pondered, with love-looks,

The ways of brooks ;
When, feeling, half-aware,
The benediction-touch upon my hair
Of something fair,
I turned from that wise water happy-voiced ;
And there,
Against the flush of waning afternoon,
Early, a dim moth-silver, poised
The Moon.

JONGLEUR

AH, ye that loved my laughter once,
Open to me ! 'Tis I
That shed you songs like summer leaves
Whenever a wind came by.
The leaves are spent and the year is old,
And the fields are gray that once were gold.
Heart of the brook, my heart is cold —
My song is like to die.

The windows look another way,
The walls are deaf and stark.
Who heeds a glow-worm in the day,
Or lifts a frozen lark ?
Warm yourself with the days that were ;
Follow the Summer, beg of her,
But never sadden us, Jongleur,
Jongleur, go down the dark!

FARE YOU WELL, JOY

NOW fare you well, my joy, that would not stay ;
Count it as nothing I besought you so.
The place is dim, the needy fire burns low ;
Go hand in hand with the unheeding day.
It is mine own heart's fault that must alway
Nest on the edge of all the winds that blow,
Forgetful that there comes a day of snow ;
Forgetful that the young year must grow gray.
But joy's so rare that it has taught me thrift ;
No moth lays waste my rich remembering ;
And I may see, with quiet eyes uplift,
— Some even, when the fire takes heart to sing —
The dusk all white with petalled snow adrift,
Like the dear ghost of young unburied Spring.

DEW-FALL

NOW the thrill of wings is brief,
Mindless of the sky,
Quiet you, my heart of grief,
Beating Why, and Why ?

Let the morrow have a care
For the morrow's need.
Fade along the hush of air,
Burden of the weed !

Not to-night shall any leaf
Urge its way anew ;
No more hope, no joy, no grief :
Only dark, and dew.

MY SOUL IS AMONG LIONS

HERE where I keep my vigil in the waste,
No wind doth come. For further loneliness
The furtive wings of air, long wont to bless
My listening soul with their eternal haste
Through the unhastening years, no more have graced
The silence, nor to blank forgetfulness
Smoothed the recording sand. No more, no less,
Stare back the foot-prints my own way hath traced.
Yet fellowship is mine ; the brotherhood
Of the horizon's lone infinity ;
Dusk and mirage, and far as sight can flee,
Two shapes that crouch on guard (lest there intrude
Hope of escape by city or by sea),
Two lions, sentinels of solitude.

IN TIME OF FAMINE

I AM the lord of all these lands
Forgotten by the rain ;
Lord of a thousand outstretched hands
That guide no plough again.

I have strong gates at north and south
Against mine enemy,
And stalwart towers that gaze on drouth
As far as towers can see.

I am the lord of these that die
And lord of a thousand dead.
Look down, Lord God ; what lack have I,
Save only bread, — bread !

OLD BROIDERIES TO C. H. B.

I

OUT of the carven chest of treasured things
That holds them dark and breathless, like a tomb,
I lift these scriptured songs of many a loom
That labors now no longer, — nay, nor sings.
And, one by one, their soft unfolding brings
Along the air some touch of ghostly bloom ;
The tacit reminiscence of perfume, —
The uncomplaining dust of mouldered springs.
Whether it be from hues, once richly bled
Of rooted flowers, some magic takes the sense,
Or if it be that meek aroma, wed
To flush and sheen and shadow, shaken thence,
Or clinging touch of aging silken thread,
They hold me with a tongueless eloquence.

II

I marvel how the broiderers could find
So sweet the summer shapes that never fade,
Though some mere passing race of man and maid
Have paled, and wasted, and gone down the wind !
Yet here the toilful art of one could bind
No dream with tenderer woven light and shade,
Than sovran bloom and fruitage, rare arrayed,
Or listless tendrils idly intertwined.
Ah, bitter-sweet ! For cagèd care to slake
Its thirst with joyance of the weed that grows,
The whim of leaf and leaf, and petal-flake,
Whatever way the breath of April blows.
And poor, wise, withered hands with skill to make
The red, unhuman gladness of the rose!

III

There is a certain damask here, moon-pale,
With the wan iris of a snow on snow,
Or petal against petal cheek ablow.
It wears its glories bride-like, under veil;
But shadowed, half, the blanchèd folds exhale
Sweet confidence of color; and there grow —
Entwined and severed by the gloom and glow —
Dim vines to muse upon till fancy fail.
I wonder: was it woven in a dream,
When, for a space, one dreamer had his fill
Of perfectness, — all white desires supreme
That lure and mock the thwarted human will?
The worker's dumb. The web lives on, agleam,
Untroubled as a lily, and as still.

IV

Ah, nameless maker at whose heart I guess
Through the surviving fabric! You were one
With potter and with poet, — you that spun
And you that stitched, unsung for it; no less
A part and pulse of all the want and stress
Of effort without end till time be done, —
The lift of longing wings unto the Sun,
Forever beckoned by far loveliness.
O wistful soul of all men, heart I hear
Close beating for the heart that understands,
Kin I deny so often, — now read clear
Across the foreign years and far-off lands,
Let me but touch and greet you, near and dear,
Cherishing these, with hands that love your hands!

THE PIPER

"PIPER, wherefore wilt thou roam?
Piper, wilt thou bide?
Here thou shalt have hearth and home,
And neighbors at thy side;
Many flocks we'll give thee, too,
Piper, an thou bide."

"Nay and nay! For one unheard
Calleth me to follow.
All I ask, a brother bird
Singing thro' the hollow;
And a friendly star at night,
And a brook to follow."

A ROAD TUNE

OH, there is morning yonder,
And night and noon again;
And I must up and wander
Away against the rain.

The forests would delay me
With a thousand little leaves;
The hilltops seek to stay me,
And valleys dim with eves.

The mist denies the mountains,
The wind forbids the sea;
But, mist or wind, I go to find
The day that calls to me.

For there are mornings yonder,
And noons that call and call;
And there's a day, with arms outheld,
That waits beyond them all.

RUBRIC

I'LL not believe the dullard dark,
Nor all the winds that weep,
But I shall find the farthest dream
That kisses me, asleep.

THE GARDEN

BETWEEN two hard breaths of a parching day,
I am rapt away
Into some unkenned garden-place,
Where for a space
Dust nor demand may reach, nor human speech,
Nor any far-off chime
From walls of Time.

But I wake up to coolness and the peace
Of cedarn fragrances;
And the remembered hush of grass made new
With morning, and with dew.
And all the darling trees of paradise,
Leaning anear, let fall
Vague petals in my eyes,
And hands, and over all,
Soft as the snow that fills the broken ground;
Till every wound
Is solaced; and no less
The air is thronged and white with happiness.
And still with one accord
They rain the petals down, soft blinding me,
So that I may surmise — but never see —
The Lord.

TO THE UNSUNG

STAY by me, Loveliness; for I must sleep.
Not even desire can lift such wearied eyes;
The day was heavy and the sun will rise
On day as heavy, weariness as deep.
Be near, though you be silent. Let me steep
A sad heart in that peace, as a child tries
To hold his comfort fast, in fingers wise
With imprint of a joy that's yet to reap.
Leave me that little light; for sleep I must,
— And put off blessing to a doubtful day —
Too dull to listen or to understand.
But only let me close the eyes of trust
On you unchanged. Ah, do not go away,
Nor let a dream come near, to loose my hand.

BEFRIENDED

IN sunshine and in rainfall,
For steadfast company,
There are the far-off, friendly hills
All unaware of me.

And when the Spring is over,
And when the grass forgets,
There are the little shadows left
As blue as violets.

The stars make shelter of the sky
With many a window-light.
The dreams that hide them all the day
Sing star-like all the night.

The winds come by from east and west
With pleasant passing words;
I warm my hands in sunset
And share my bread with birds.

THE ENEMY LISTENS

THE ENEMY LISTENS

HOW long it has lain drowsing in my heart,
The torpid fear, half witless of its sting,
Who knows? . . . Yet haply He has smiled apart,
All-knowing and all-silent: ay, at this,
How it uncoils slow length, awakening,
And wakes to hiss!

Here may I lean and glory in my wings
While all the stars go singing, sphere on sphere
Bound to an orbit; and with echoings
They set the darkness throbbing. Oh, I hear
How they all sing, to bind
Me, — where I poise and laugh at them like wind,
But none too near.

If He be All in All, why stays He yet
To burn moth-wings that fly athwart His will?
If He be master, why has He not set
A hand upon my mouth, to say, *Be still,*
As snowfall dumbs the Earth,
And with the leaves all laughterless, her mirth
Falls brown and chill!

Why is He silent? For the seasons shift,
A rainbow change of summer and of cold,
And light and dark, like flickering clouds that drift
Across a bubble, rose and green and gold
All in a bright dismay,
Before it vanish in a little spray:
The Earth grows old.

Yet all the while unshadowed, I take care
To lie in wait for eager ships that be
So brave to follow, — hunt them to my lair,
And drag them down, a-quiver to be free,
With broken wings, until,
Struck through with fangs of lightning, they lie still
To feed the Sea.

Is He not vext? Myself, I like them well:
They coax me like the foolish nest, unsought,
Loath to be taken, that must ever tell
Where music is. So have I often caught
The winds, to pluck their sting
And send them weaponless and wandering
And good for naught.

Have I not stirred the swarms that work men ill?
Ravelled time's work? Have I not laughed to see
How they cursed Him, unwitting of my will,
For all the bickering hate, when straight as bee
Homeward at evening,
With ruin laden every pest took wing
Homeward to me!

What have I spared save those mad stars of His
Because I would not come too near their song,
Urging to madness everything that is,
Luring to follow, drawing me along
To follow, on the height,
A foolish pathway trodden into light
By all the throng!

Look how they all go timely, one and one,
To do His bidding ; they that might go free,
And do His bidding ! — moon and star and sun,
Singing the spell that reaches after me.
They know not they are mad :
Even the Earth, wan drudge, goes ever sad
And bright to see.

I would not listen, — nay, I will not hear.
So the sea-tides at ebb and flow may plead
With sea-drift. So it is, if you come near,
A world would whirl you whither it may lead.
So may the wind — who knows ? —
Urge all the petals of a doubtful rose :
My rose, take heed !

I will not listen. Like a flock of birds
Circled about the tamer, set to sing
With hearts abeat to his unspoken words, —
Wild joys, all bright and unremembering, —
So it may be that each
Has faltered, trembled, felt the tamer reach
To bind his wing.

Is it His spell that measures what they sing ?
Some rhythm within His silence that they hear,
Whence all the echoes widen, ring on ring,
With all the irised light from sphere to sphere ?
Surely the currents start
Pulsing high tide from some immortal heart :
There wakes the fear.

Why does He tarry? Say I fear Him not,
Reach up and blow the stars out one by one,
Unleash, to exultations long forgot,
The planets He hath charmed: were it well done?
Bind all the winds that be,
Shake meteors from their husks, drink of the sea,
Outstare the sun!

Would it avail? So I make shift to break
The enringing song and scatter it through space
Like rainfall fair to see, — and if I take
The lordship on me in that desert place:
To be alone with Him
There in the void, among dead worlds left dim,
And face to face?

What if His silence waits me, like a net
Hid in the midst of them that lure and call,
Till I — I falter, tremble, and forget
Glory and joyance to be tamed His thrall?
Even now, on laggard wing, —
Even now too long I listen, wondering
If He be All!

ENVOY

THOU knowest, O my own Unsung,
I longed to speak a common tongue,
To set this reed
Unto the voice of Everyday
With its familiar yea and nay,
Unto the common heart and need.
Yet oftentimes, indeed, I seem
To dream ; — to dream . . .
How over walls of paradise
The darling trees lean down to shed
A petal. And I wake, with eyes
Uncomforted.
Ah, Beautiful, be mild to teach
This newcomer the household speech ;
So I some day with better grace
May take the bounty of the place :
Some day with eyes that know the years
I may have wiser words to sing,
Nor eat my bread with furtive tears
Of home-longing.
But go where lights and highways call,
To hear the soothsay of them all,
And rest by any door ;
With hands outheld and heart uplift
To take, and welcome for a gift,
The wisdom of the one day more.

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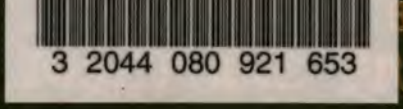
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